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ABSTRACT

An analysis was done of federal statistics to explore the relationship between Hispanic Americans' dropout rates and migration. An analysis of November 1989 data revealed that among 16- to 24-year-olds Hispanic American dropout rates are 3 times higher than those for non-Hispanic Americans. In looking at the impact of immigration on Hispanic American dropout rates the analysis found that Hispanic American dropout rates were higher than those for non-Hispanic Americans even when subjects' place of birth was taken into account. About 72 percent of 16- to 24-year-old Hispanic Americans were not born in the United States or were first generation as compared to 9 percent of non-Hispanic Americans. The dropout rate for Mexican Americans is 35.8 percent, for Puerto Ricans is 32.1 percent, and for Cubans is 9.2 percent. Mexican Americans account for 64 percent of the Hispanic American population. Of those Hispanic Americans who are dropouts, 63 percent were not born in the United States, while 3 percent of non-Hispanic American dropouts were not born in the United States. Overall, the analysis suggests that immigration appears to be a contributing factor to the high dropout rate among Hispanic Americans. If this pattern continues with the children of the current generation, then high dropout rates may continue in the future even if immigration rates decline substantially. Included are two figures and one table. (JB)

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NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS

Issue Brief

August 1992

ARE HISPANIC DROPOUT RATES RELATED TO MIGRATION?

RECENT evidence about dropout rates has contained both encouraging and discouraging signs. While rates for blacks and whites have been declining, Hispanic dropout rates are high and have shown no evidence of decline. Furthermore, Hispanic dropouts on average complete fewer years of schooling than do non-Hispanic dropouts.

Policymakers frequently ask how much immigration[1] contributes to the high Hispanic dropout rate.[2] An analysis of November 1989 data reveals the following information about 16- to 24-year-olds:

- Hispanic dropout rates (31.0 percent) were three times those of non-Hispanics (10.3 percent).
- 45 percent of Hispanics were born outside the 50 states and D.C. and the dropout rate for this group was very high--43 percent.
- 63 percent of all Hispanic dropouts were born elsewhere.[3]
- Dropout rates for Hispanics who were at least first generation were also high, more than double those for non-Hispanics.
- If current patterns continue, Hispanic dropout rates are likely to remain high in the future, even if immigration slows considerably.

What is the impact of immigration on Hispanic dropout rates?

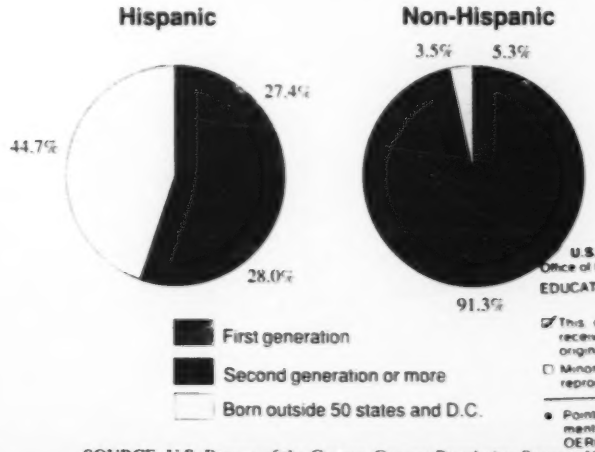
The high dropout rate for the large group of Hispanics born elsewhere is only part of the explanation for the high Hispanic dropout rate. Hispanic dropout rates are higher than those for non-Hispanics, even when place of birth is taken into account. The difference was most striking for those born elsewhere, where the dropout rate for Hispanics was more than 5 times that for the non-Hispanic population born elsewhere. However, dropout rates were also substantial for first and at least second generation Hispanics; their dropout rates were more than double those of comparable non-Hispanics.

One way of estimating the impact of movement to the states on the Hispanic dropout rate is to estimate what their dropout rate would be if Hispanics had the same share of born-elsewhere, first, and at least second generation population as non-Hispanics. If Hispanics resembled the immigration patterns for the rest of the population, but the dropout rate for Hispanics in each category remained the same, the Hispanic dropout rate would be about 24.1 percent. Thus, if Hispanics were no more likely to be born elsewhere than non-Hispanics, the Hispanic dropout rate would still be more than twice that for non-Hispanics.

How many Hispanics are immigrants?

About 11 percent of the 32 million 16- to 24-year-olds were Hispanics. Among these were 2.2 million Mexican-Americans, 380,000 Puerto Ricans, 110,000 Cubans, and 730,000 "other Hispanics." Hispanics were far more likely to be born elsewhere or to be first generation--born in this country but with at least one parent born elsewhere--than non-Hispanics (figure 1). About 72 percent of Hispanic 16-to 24-year-olds were born elsewhere or were first generation as compared to 9 percent of non-Hispanics.

Figure 1. Recency of migration among 16- to 24-year-olds by ethnicity: November 1989



SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey, 1989.

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Table 1. Percent of status dropouts among 16- to 24-year-olds, by recency of migration and ethnicity: November 1989

Recency of migration	Total	Hispanic	Non-Hispanic
Total*	12.5	31.0	10.3
Born outside 50 states and D.C.	28.9	43.0	7.9
First generation	10.4	17.3	6.2
Second generation or more	11.2	23.7	10.7

*Total includes a small proportion for whom recency of migration is unknown.
SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey, 1989.

How many Hispanics drop out?

The dropout rate for 16- to 24-year-olds was 12.5 percent and was three times higher for Hispanics (31 percent) than for non-Hispanics (10 percent). About 26 percent of all dropouts, or 1.1 million, were Hispanic. How long a family has been in the states is strongly related to dropout rates for Hispanics (table1).

Hispanics born elsewhere had a dropout rate of 43 percent. (Some of these dropouts may never have attended schools in the 50 states or D.C.) The rates for first and at least second generation Hispanics were considerably lower. Among non-Hispanics, dropout rates for those born elsewhere were about the same as for those who were first generation or more.

How do dropout rates vary among Hispanics?

Compared to the dropout rate for all Hispanics (31.0 percent), the dropout rates for Mexican-Americans (35.8 percent) and Puerto Ricans (32.1 percent) were about the same, but those for "other Hispanics" (19.0 percent) and Cubans (9.2 percent) were lower.

Mexican-Americans accounted for about 64 percent of the Hispanic population, and about 74 percent of all Hispanic dropouts in this age group. Among Mexican-Americans born elsewhere, the dropout rate was 55 percent; this group accounted for about 48 percent of all Hispanic dropouts.

Where are most dropouts born?

The share of dropouts who are born elsewhere is very different for Hispanics and non-Hispanics (figure 2). Over 600 thousand or 63 percent of Hispanic dropouts were born elsewhere (including 6 percent or about 60,000 Puerto Ricans born in Puerto Rico). On the other hand, 3 percent of non-Hispanic dropouts were born elsewhere.

Conclusion

Immigration appears to be a contributing factor to the high dropout rate among Hispanics. About 45 percent of Hispanics were born elsewhere and dropout rates were much higher for them than for Hispanics born in the 50 states and D.C. However, dropout rates are higher for Hispanics than for non-Hispanics, even when recency of immigration is taken into account. If this pattern continues with the children of the current generation's Hispanics who were born elsewhere, then high dropout rates may continue in the future, even if the magnitude of Hispanic immigration were to decline substantially.

[1] The term "immigration" in this report includes both migration to the 50 states and D.C. from Puerto Rico and the territories and international migration from other countries.

[2] The dropout measure used in this report is the status dropout rate, which indicates the proportion of 16- to 24-year-olds in November of 1989 who were not enrolled in school and had not completed high school.

[3] In this report, people born in Puerto Rico and the territories, although U.S. citizens, are grouped with those born in other countries. Because of issues related to language and schooling and because CPS does not cover the outlying areas, individuals born in Puerto Rico and U.S. territories are distinguished from those born in the 50 states and D.C. In the text, all such individuals are referred to as "born elsewhere."

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*For more information about dropout rates, see U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, **Dropout Rates in the United States: 1988, 1989, and 1990**. The dropout rates in this report vary slightly from those in the dropout reports, because they are derived from November rather than October data. However, the differences are not statistically significant. The Current Population Survey, the source of the data in this issue brief, is a monthly survey of approximately 53,000 households conducted by the Bureau of the Census. It covers the non-institutional population in the 50 states and the District of Columbia. A technical appendix containing standard errors and additional information about the survey, the data, and methodology is available upon request.*

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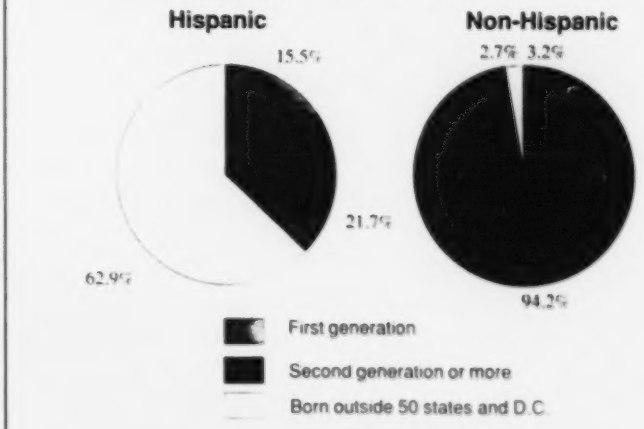
Figure 2. Recency of migration of 16- to 24-year-old dropouts by ethnicity: November 1989



SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey, 1989.